



THE DEANES SCHOOL CONSULTATION

A Review by a Task and Finish Group of the
People & Families Scrutiny Committee

August 2013

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS



Essex County Council

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ANNEX A

An Extract from the Minutes of the People & Families Scrutiny Committee which formally established The Deanes School Task and Finish Group

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE PEOPLE AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD, ON THURSDAY 4 JULY 2013

County Councillors:

* G Butland (Chairman)	* P Honeywood
* A Bayley	* R Howard
* D Blackwell	* N Hume
* K Bobbin	* M McEwen
R Boyce	M McGeorge
* J Chandler	* C Seagers
R Gadsby	* A Wood
* T Higgins	

Non-Elected Voting Members :

* Mr R Carson	Rev R Jordan
Mr M Christmas	Ms M Uzzell

*present

The following Member was also present:
Councillor V Metcalfe

The following officers were present in support throughout the meeting:

Robert Fox	Governance Officer
Matthew Waldie	Committee Officer

The meeting opened at 2.00 pm.

1. Apologies and Substitutions

The Committee Officer reported the receipt of the following apologies:

Apologies	Substitutes
Cllr R Boyce	
Cllr R Gadsby	
Cllr M McGeorge	Cllr K Bobbin
Mr M Christmas	--
Rev R Jordan	--

4. Consultation on the closure of The Deanes School, Benfleet

Timing. The Chairman noted that the Committee should aim to produce a report prior to the decision being made; so the target would be late August or early September. Given that the school holidays begin shortly, he decided to bring this meeting forward a week, to permit the scrutiny process to get underway. This will allow the bulk of the evidence to be taken before schools break up.

10 July: Council puts forward its case

17 July: School puts forward its case (venue, the school itself)

29 July: input from local Members

30 July: evidence from Castle Point BC, and possibly from Southend BC.

Witnesses will be asked to provide bullet point summaries of their case before relevant meetings and all Committee Members should receive a copy of these.

It was noted that the process must be open and perceived to be so, as there was some concern among parents that it was a fait accompli.

Make-up of the Task & Finish Group Local Members should not be members of the Group itself, but would have the opportunity to give their input to the process.

In response to a suggestion that perhaps local members would be well placed to be part of the Task & Finish Group, the Chairman pointed that any local Member sitting on the Group could be put in a difficult position, serving both as judge and advocate. He reiterated the importance of public perception of impartiality.

Proposed T&FG Membership:

Cllr Butland (Chairman)

Cllr Higgins and Cllr Hume (experienced Members)

Cllr Chandler and Wood (Members new to the County Council)

Mr Carson (nominated member - parent governor)

It was noted that Mark Christmas, the other school governor Committee member, had originally been proposed, but he lives in the Benfleet area.

Minutes of the first Task and Finish Group Evidence Session

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE DEANES SCHOOL CONSULTATION TASK AND FINISH GROUP, A COMMITTEE OF THE PEOPLE AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD, ON WEDNESDAY 10 JULY 2013

County Councillors:

* G Butland (Chairman)	* N Hume
J Chandler	* A Wood
* T Higgins	

Non-Elected Voting Member:

* Mr R Carson

*present

The following Member was also present:
Councillor V Metcalfe

The following officers were present in support throughout the meeting:

Robert Fox	Governance Officer
Matthew Waldie	Committee Officer

The meeting opened at 10.30 am.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr Chandler.

2. Membership

The membership was confirmed as above. It was noted that Richard Carson has replaced Mark Christmas, as Mr Christmas is a resident of Benfleet.

3. The future of The Deanes School: consultation

Timing. The Chairman noted that the Group would gather evidence over the next three weeks and produce a report in the latter half of August, with recommendations for the Cabinet Member.

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Ray Gooding, Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning, and Tim Coulson, Director of Education and Learning, and asked Councillor Gooding to address the meeting.

Councillor Gooding pointed out that he was not only presenting the Council's case for this decision, but he was also presenting the case for moving forward, so that future decisions can be scrutinised with vigour.

There are complexities in this case. The Deanes is not a failing school – standards are good, as is staff commitment. The main issue is ongoing pupil numbers. These had remained on a reasonable plateau for some years, but recently have fallen off significantly. When the numbers were projected forward, County was not confident that there would be an increase. If this situation were to persist, the school would have difficulty in maintaining the appropriate quality in the breadth and depth of its teaching – because of the consequent reduction in funding.

Another factor is the co-location of Glenwood Special School.

But the two major factors are, however:

- The future viability of the school
- Continuing to commit significant capital expenditure in the face of falling numbers.

The level of emotion aroused by this proposal has been demonstrated by the number of public meetings that have been held and Cllr Gooding would expect the Group to show some sympathy toward this. But Members must also be wary of the strength of emotion, and whether this is sustainable.

Having taken up the portfolio following the 2 May election, Cllr Gooding had a meeting with Tim Coulson on 8 May to discuss the school capital programme, when this issue was raised. This resulted in a further meeting, with the Leader.

The approach was not “We need to trim the budget” but “This is affordable, but is it good value for money?” The £22 million has been set aside in the budget and is currently ring-fenced; so work could proceed if the decision were made to use it.

Numbers:

The predicted numbers for the next 10 years were noted. The Chairman expressed a concern that, presumably similar figures were available to the Cabinet Member’s predecessor, when he made the decision to fund the work; what has changed in the meantime?

Cllr Gooding explained the figures. There are 650 pupils this year in a school built for 1000. Over the next few years, a significant drop in numbers is expected, taking it down to 500. Even if the new school was built for a reduced number of 750, 500 would only represent 67% of capacity.

In response to the suggestion that having a new building would increase numbers, Cllr Gooding suggested that the local demographic would mean that any likely rise would be insufficient. Considering the figures: many parents would avoid sending their children to a school undergoing major rebuilding work, so that might lead to a further short-term decrease, perhaps of 5%. Once the rebuilding was finished, even if the numbers were pushed back up by the attractiveness of a new building, perhaps by 10%, that would still not bring them up sufficiently.

Historical preferences of local parents does not show strong support for The Deanes over other local schools.

The Chairman suggested that the Audit trail seemed poor for such a substantial project; and it was noted that neither Cllr Gooding's nor Dr Coulson's predecessors were still at the Council.

However, Dr Coulson has spoken to his predecessor about the process. The original plans were drawn up when the Government's Building Schools for the Future programme was still running. At this stage, schools in the Colchester area were pushed up the building programme, and when the BSF was scrapped, the south Essex schools just missed the cut. In 2011, Glenwood in particular was looked at, and in 2012, it was put back in the programme. The projection at the time was that numbers would fall below 750, but that the newbuild would reverse that decline.

It was in any case a marginal decision. In the event, numbers have turned out lower than anticipated and school budgets are also worse. 600 is considered an absolute minimum, and present indicators suggest numbers will drop to 500.

Cllr Gooding did not recall any discussion of this project at Cabinet.

The Chairman emphasised the importance of this to the Committee. He wanted to be able to consider the original decision and be able to say whether it was sound or perverse. He asked the Cabinet Member to look into this further and glean as much information as possible. Cllr Gooding agreed and welcomed this, pointing out that he would like to make the process as transparent as possible. The Chairman added that they might also learn from the process as well.

Cllr Hume noted the three options listed in the paper and he suggested there was little evidence that the Council had explored the other options. He reminded the meeting that this decision affected people's real lives. Cllr Gooding believed that doing nothing was not an option at all, as that would subject the school to a lingering death – for him, consultation was the only way forward.

Cllr Hume suggested that smaller schools can do well, as long as they are able to match their budgets to the education they provide.

A refurbishment programme, which had been estimated as costing £4 million, was not thought to be a viable option.

In response to a question, Dr Coulson explained the methodology for estimating projected figures for the next ten years:

- The figures are based initially on how birth and GPs' records translate into numbers for primary schools.
- Then the popularity of the relevant schools is assessed. This is the certainly the hardest to predict. The Deanes has historically been a popular school – but to some extent with children for out of catchment, and one reason for a dropping popularity may be that the schools in these areas from which Deanes pupils used to come have now

improved, and so the parents are now happy to see their children in their catchment schools.

- An assumption has been made here that the other two schools, King John and Appleton, will continue to be oversubscribed
- A further consideration is the likely change to housing in the area of the school over that period, which relies on the forward planning of local authorities. In this case, Castle Point's plans are: 550 new homes by 2019, with 220 each year after that. A basic assumption is that a housing development of 800 homes will require 1 new class per year group.

When further asked about numbers of pupils coming in from out of catchment areas, Dr Coulson pointed out that Year 11 at The Deanes has 79 pupils from Southend, whereas the figure is only 15 in Year 7. With Basildon, although the trend appears upward (16 in Year 11, 22 in Year 7), the numbers have never been large. The Basildon position is important, as there is population growth, but its secondary schools are very undersubscribed at the moment, partly because of poor perception of them; and it is hoped that they will improve soon. This will make it less likely that parents will want their children to travel to The Deanes. Appleton has historically received more Basildon pupils, being geographically nearer.

Cllr Wood asked about the impact on the quality of: (i) the education of those having to move from The Deanes, and (ii), the education being provided by the other schools, as they have to expand to cope with the new intake.

Dr Coulson pointed out that both schools are looking into this matter. Both have indicated their intention to take these extra pupils, but are consulting relevant parties about it; and they will not compromise on quality just to oblige the County Council. With regard to the other schools, both are looking at three courses of action to accommodate the changes foreseen by the closure: expansion of their sixth forms, provision for children coming in at mid point, and creation of a new class. The sixth form expansion in particular should enable them to deal with the initial increase. He conceded that it will be hard to progress the closure of The Deanes, if the other schools ultimately decide not to take these extra pupils.

Cllr Higgins suggested that more figures were required for a larger area than those provided, citing the experience of Colchester. Dr Coulson agreed to provide these, but pointed out that this area was not experiencing a population "bulge" akin to that of Colchester.

In response to questions, Cllr Gooding confirmed that The Deanes could change to Academy status at any point before its doors actually close in 2016, but they must meet certain criteria:

- a good enough inspection – which they certainly fulfil
- prospects for improvement
- financial viability.

The Deanes have suggested that previously they had been persuaded not to pursue Academy status, because of the promised £22m funding from Essex; Mr Coulson conceded that the school might feel let down by this.

However, given the figures presented by Essex, the school was faced with a deficit of £220k, with a projected tenfold increase over the next few years, which made their position weak with regard financial viability. Dr Coulson did point out that they have produced revised figures that do balance. He added that County is continuing to liaise with the school but is not convinced by these new figures.

Dr Coulson added that an application to convert to an Academy made now might become effective in January 2014 at the earliest.

Regarding the position of Glenwood, Cllr Gooding reiterated the intention of rebuilding the school on the existing site of The Deanes. He noted that the site itself is actually owned by the Governors of The Deanes, as it is a Foundation School, so any redevelopment would require their permission.

Mr Carson asked about the sports facilities on site and what thought had been given to the provision of these to the local community, if the building were to be demolished. Cllr Gooding acknowledged that the school does provide such facilities to the public, but he pointed out that County's prime concern here is the provision of education for children. If the school happened to have good facilities used by local people as an add-on, that was good, but was not necessarily a major factor in the decision-making process. However, he conceded it would need some further consideration.

When asked whether those pupils being transferred to alternative schools would receive the level of sports provision currently enjoyed by them at The Deanes, Cllr Gooding pointed out that all secondary schools have a certain level of sporting provision.

Dr Coulson was asked about the effect of this consultation on the selection process for prospective parents. Parents were being asked to select their schools as if the school will remain open; but if the decision is made to close the school, those who have made The Deanes their first choice will have this choice discarded, so they are not disadvantaged. The Chairman asked for further details of the schools selection in this area, to see how those currently at The Deanes made their initial choices.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Gooding and Dr Coulson for their contribution and reminded them that the Committee might approach them again, once it had progressed further. In the meantime, he asked that they provide the information requested at this meeting.

4. Dates of next meetings

The Committee noted the date of the next meeting:
Wednesday 17 July 2013, at The Deanes School. at 10.00 am.

The meeting closed at 12.09 pm.

Chairman

Minutes of the second Task and Finish Group Evidence Session

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE DEANES SCHOOL CONSULTATION TASK AND FINISH GROUP, A COMMITTEE OF THE PEOPLE AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, HELD AT THE DEANES SCHOOL, THUNDERSLEY, ON WEDNESDAY 17 JULY 2013

County Councillors:

- | | |
|------------------------|----------|
| * G Butland (Chairman) | * N Hume |
| * J Chandler | * A Wood |
| * T Higgins | |

Non-Elected Voting Member:

- * Mr R Carson

*present

The following officers were present in support throughout the meeting:

Robert Fox	Governance Officer
Matthew Waldie	Committee Officer

The meeting opened at 10.00 am.

1. Apologies

There were none.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Evidence from The Deanes School to the Task and Finish Group

a) The School's own case

The Chairman reminded those present that no decisions would be taken today; the aim is to gather and test evidence that will form part of the scrutiny process. The Committee may also seek clarification on certain points from witnesses in due course.

He pointed out that this Task & Finish Group will produce its own report, quite separate to any produced by officers working in Education, who would be working on behalf of Councillor Gooding, the Cabinet Member. This Committee was independent.

The Chairman welcomed the representatives of the School and invited them to address the meeting.

Ian Rudd, Chair of Governors opened by stating that The Deanes was not happy about the process that had led to the present situation; but the Cabinet Member had confirmed that if the School were able to show that it might be viable over the next 5 years, then everything could be brought back to the table.

Mr Desi McKeown, Assistant Headteacher, then gave a presentation. He began by pointing out that, contrary to what was suggested by ECC at the consultation evenings, pupil numbers in Castle Point are not relatively static, showing a steep decline between 2010 and 2013, but likely to rise again over the next few years. The Deanes did not contest the ECC figures relating to current pupil numbers and District forecasts. However, the way the forecast numbers for The Deanes are calculated is by filling both the Appleton and the King John to their capacity, and making slight adjustments to the Canvey schools, based on historical trends. The remaining numbers give the figures for The Deanes. Therefore this gives an allocation based on historical popularity, which is not a good method for looking forward. However, these figures have to be taken as read.

There are 4 scenarios:

1. No change to admissions. This is the base from which the decision on whether The Deanes should close or not stems— ie the succession of years with a relatively high surplus of places in Castle Point leads to this conclusion. (NB the ideal figure is for schools to have an excess of between 5 and 10 percent, to allow for migration and population changes).
2. The Deanes School closes. This would lead to a dramatic deficit in places.
3. The Deanes School closes and The King John and Appleton schools increase their intake by 30 places each. This would still result in a surplus of less than 5% for the next 10 years. Also, both schools are academies, which means that Essex have no control over them. They also have a certain percentage of their intake based on a selective process, which complicates the likely outcomes.
4. The Deanes School reduces its number to admit 120. This gives a much healthier surplus figure over the next decade, and The Deanes sees this as the most appropriate way forward – ie looking at a school of 600.

It was noted that these scenarios all were based on the ECC figures and did not take into account any new housing in the area; so the actual figures would almost certainly be higher.

The School Team responded to Members' questions:

- Reducing the entry total to 120 would fit the overall figures well and would give flexibility, enabling a split into even halves, for example
- The school's unique selling point has been its size – parents choosing The Deanes have done so because it is smaller than its nearest alternatives. The school itself has underestimated this as a strength in the past and intends to market this aspect more strongly in future

Past Predictions. Members noted that the predicted numbers for Year 7 admissions for the successive years up to 2017/8 admission were worse in May 2012, when the decision was made to rebuild the School. The Chairman referred

to the importance of this point- that they needed to see what had changed in the past year, if anything, and to judge whether the original decision was a good one, or a perverse one.

Jan Atkinson, Headteacher, described the relevant history. The school had a strong vision for SEN/inclusion and was due to receive £30m BSFF funding for a rebuild for a 1,000 place school. When this was withdrawn, Essex offered £23m for a reduced size (900), plus 150 for Glenwood. The other part of this was for an Olympic legacy for the area, with the School as the hub. 42 schools have already signed up to use the facilities for the next 2 years; and the school has signed up to a trust of 16 primary schools. The school received strong support for this from County. It was a different approach – a vision for inclusivity, bringing in Glenwood as well – building on Olympic and paralympic values. This was seen as a pioneering approach.

Dialogue was conducted with several senior officers at County Hall, right up to May 2013. The only change was that the numbers were reduced to 750. The school was even encouraged to retain a larger leadership team than she required, with this in view.

Mr McKeown suggested that County have not made any calculations based on the impact of the school being rebuilt. He drew attention to figures based on Belfairs School Admissions data, which showed the positive effect of a rebuild, particularly in respect of catchment pupils.

In response to a question from the Chairman on what the school's response to a large increase in applications would be. Mrs Atkinson confirmed that they would like to retain the unique selling point of the smaller school ethos, although she might look to increasing numbers, perhaps to 750.

Mr McKeown pointed out that, in a survey of parents who had not chosen The Deanes, the "school buildings/facilities" had been cited as the reason by 38% respondents, behind only "School close to home" (66%) and "Exam results" (41%).

Size of School. With regard to the impact of the size of a school on its curriculum and opportunities for pupils, Mr McKeown suggested that ECC had only given one view – that staff would be under greater pressure as there were fewer on them, so having a detrimental effect on overall education in the school. There was another view, that smaller schools were able to create more "personalisation of education" and greater engagement of pupils.

Mrs Atkinson added that there are a number of smaller schools in Essex who have expressed the wish to form a smaller schools to share ideas, etc. They have asked her to assist in this process and dialogue is already ongoing.

Budget. Revised figures were presented. These required a reduction in staffing level, but this reflected the reduced anticipated intake figures. It was noted that these figures were very different to the figures presented as part of the original consultation.

Mrs Lesley Smith, School Business Manager, explained the history. The Deanes had been in a deficit situation a few years ago, and had come out of it. (The deficit had been of £300,000 and had taken 3 years to clear.) Consequently, the School worked with Essex Finance Monitoring, holding meetings at least termly. The School had prepared figures based on a 120 intake, but had been asked to rework these, based on ECC's intake figures, which they did. A meeting with Essex Finance Monitoring had been scheduled for 22 April to consider these figures, but this had been cancelled. So the figures quoted by ECC were provisional ones, which were never intended for public scrutiny.

In response to a question from a Member, Mr Rudd confirmed his belief that the County Council were being disingenuous in using these figures. Mrs Atkinson explained that normally, the School and Essex Finance Monitoring would work together on these figures. This had been the process for the past 6 years. But in this case, there was no comeback, until the closure was announced.

The School had also asked for figures on running costs based on a rebuild, but none had been forthcoming.

The Budget is based on the next five years, with all current pupils remaining, with a limited Year 7 intake of 80 in 2013-14, but 120 thereafter. The intake could be as low as 106 in 2014-15 and still avoid a deficit. And if the intake only rose to 100 in 2014-15, there would be a deficit of £25,000 after 5 years. The Chairman requested further figures, showing how breakeven figures would work through.

Housing. Mrs Lisa Stroud, Assistant Headteacher, believed that the ECC had underestimated local housing proposals and their impact on the School. Of eight strategic sites identified, five were in Castle Point. This included two on Canvey, but as the current surplus of school spaces on Canvey is limited, this will impact on The Deanes. The King John and the Appleton are full.

The School has calculated figures on the expected demand for school places, which produces figures much higher than those of the ECC, and the School believes even these to be conservative.

The Chairman noted that the Committee will follow this up with Castle Point Borough Council, when they present their evidence on 30 July.

The SS7 Postcode area does take in substantial numbers of pupils from surrounding areas, particularly from SS13 (Basildon) - 288, of whom 48 go to The Deanes; and SS0, SS5, SS8 and SS9 (Southend) - 703, of whom 260 attend The Deanes.

The Chairman requested information on how these pupils get to their respective schools.

This, when coupled with the ECC's own figures showing that there is likely to be a shortage of secondary school capacity in the longer term (ie by 2022) in

Basildon and Rochford, makes closing down a school like The Deanes a short-sighted measure.

Mrs Stroud made a comparison with similar schools to The Deanes (ie not grammars or faith-based schools). In Rayleigh both schools are outstanding, with exam results higher than The Deanes. In Southend, the nearest school, Belfairs, is heavily oversubscribed, with most being in catchment; of those with places, Cecil Jones is a 5.7 miles away, with poorer exam results and Futures is even further, with an unsatisfactory Ofsted report. In Basildon, the Academy has an inadequate Ofsted and is very unpopular; the other two are both over 6 miles away and have poorer exam results and Woodlands is oversubscribed. This demonstrates the way parental choice would be eroded, were The Deanes to be closed.

There being no further questions, the Chairman thanked those present for the presentation and input, and closed the first part of the meeting, at 12 noon.

b) The Impact of the Closure on SEEVIC College, Essex SEN Strategy and on the Wider Community

The Chairman welcomed those attending to give evidence on the impact of the closure relating to SEEVIC College, Essex SEN Strategy and on the wider community.

Mr Nick Spenceley, Principal of SEEVIC, spoke on its behalf. The College has 2700 full time students, aged 16-18. It has six partner schools, one of which is The Deanes.

Mr Spenceley wished to make three points:

- i. The proposals have not been considered holistically. SEEVIC is linked closely with local schools and takes about 130 pupils each year from The Deanes. He was surprised not to have been consulted;
- ii. The Special Needs Provision in relation to the capital building project has not been thought out;
- iii. The School has a major interest in sport – this is an area that could have been worked on and developed.

Mr John Revill, Vice-Principal of SEEVIC, agreed with Mr Spenceley's view, and added that those pupils who had come from The Deanes had done very well at SEEVIC. There has also been some discussion on using the Nursery as a joint resource for both The Deanes and SEEVIC, with regard to placements.

If The Deanes were to close, SEEVIC would expect to lose a significant number of those pupils who would have gone there. It would represent about 9-10%. This would compound the existing problem of falling rolls at the moment. The overall impact might amount to the present total roll of 2,700 dropping to 2,000 in a few years' time.

Mrs Brenda Dalley, Head of Hadleigh Infant School, spoke next, on behalf of 19 local primary schools. The Deanes carries out many activities on behalf of the

primary schools and has been providing support, where sports funding has dropped off. There is much interaction between the school and The Deanes. There is a special ethos about this school that would not be replicated by other schools.

Judith Salter, Head of Glenwood, added that there is a strong feeling of “can do” and “can I help you?” that is quite unique. There is a very strong feeling of the community of schools.

Mrs Dalley added that the threat of closure is already having an impact on the primary schools, as some parents are expressing their desire not to go to the other schools and are thinking of moving away from the area.

Councillor Hume pointed out that, for all the School’s positive attributes, many parents did not seem to be choosing The Deanes before other schools; could she account for this? Mrs Dalley suggested that the often the only negative comments she heard were that the buildings were so poor.

Ms Salter added that many parents were unaware of the work carried out at The Deanes.

Ms Salter then spoke about Glenwood School. This is an all-age special school, for 3-18 year-olds. It has very poor facilities (eg, 50% classrooms are relocatables), but it still achieved an outstanding in all areas in last year’s Ofsted inspection.

Over the last four years it has developed a strong relationship with The Deanes, which has had a significant impact on the pupils, and this has had a knock-on effect on the parents as well. The two schools have already started looking at ways of interchanging staff and Deanes pupils have come to see another area of potential job opportunities through their contact with Glenwood.

The biggest current concern for Glenwood is the new building, but the next priority would be to co-locate with The Deanes, so they could develop the work they have already set out to do.

It was confirmed at this point that the £23m set aside will provide one large building and the two schools co-located.

In response to a Member’s question, Ms Salter confirmed another benefit of co-location would be greater visibility. Parents of her pupils still suffered from negative comments and attitudes from the general public; this would encourage engagement with more people – which could only benefit the school. An interesting development has been to see pupils with siblings at Glenwood, who now openly talk about them; whereas before they would not admit to such a fact.

Mr Rudd confirmed that there are a number of genuinely shared activities held by the two schools that would be lost to the pupils. He added that The Deanes is fully committed to making this a flagship project with Glenwood.

Steve Bish, Partnership Development Manager, addressed the meeting. He began by reporting briefly on the Heritage Day, which has involved 16 local schools and has included a presentation by Glenwood pupils – an excellent example of how the inclusion work is bearing fruit.

Mr Bish tabled a document listing the extensive activities and opportunities being provided by the School. But he also made two other points:

Sport, from three perspectives. 1, The Deanes was an original sports college in 1999 with emphasis on sporting excellence. 2, It is the hub for the Schools Sports Partnership, which covers Castle Point and Rochford. It involves 24,000 students and countless numbers of staff across the schools. The new sport premium funding scheme will provide a grant to primary schools for sport; and all the schools in this area have signed up to do their programme with The Deanes – a unique situation in the County. This has been built on trust, developing relationships and expertise. It is not just about pupils, but the staff as well. 3, the School serves as a community sports centre as well. It has 3,900 members (400 in the tennis club alone). It is not privately run, but fully through the School. 7,000 children come through the School during the summer holidays. There is nothing comparable in the area. Investment is needed to help keep the facilities up to date.

In response to a Member's question, Mr Bish confirmed that the investment set aside for sports was £300,000; this would be matched funding.

The Chairman suggested that the School must be drawing people to their facilities, in spite of some of the facilities. Mr Bish agreed – there was an emphasis on relationships that had been built up, on what the community want, and it has been helped by being able to apply for certain funding only available to schools.

The Chairman questioned whether the needs of the school restricted access in some ways – eg during the day, when the School is using the facilities. Mr Bish pointed out that this was not a problem – the School will work around situations to fit. Again, relationships were key here, with the School trying to accommodate those who use its facilities.

Mr Bish also mentioned the BATIC Trust ("Benfleet and Thundersley Interschool Cluster Trust"), which is about heritage as well as sport; and there has also been governor training conducted through the Trust. The Deanes is the only secondary school of the 16 schools involved and is the driving force.

In response to a question from Mr Carson, Mr Bish confirmed that all the infant, junior, primary and special schools across Castle Point and Rochford (48 schools in total) rely on The Deanes for resources – ie facilities and expertise.

The new sport premium funding will bring about £200-250,000 from September.

Councillor Wood asked about the School and Academy status. Mrs Atkinson confirmed that, in the wake of the good Ofsted report, with outstanding elements,

the School considered changing to Academy status. In fact, it was the first of the schools in the area to take this forward. But the ECC asked the School not to, because they wanted to give them the money. The Academy paperwork was all drawn up in February 2011, at which point The Deanes withdrew from the process, as they had been assured of the ECC's support.

The Chairman thanked all for their contribution and closed the second session, at 1.03 pm.

After lunch , at 1.40 pm, the Committee reconvened, Members noted that Councillor Hume had another prior engagement and so gave his apologies for the afternoon sessions.

The Chairman welcomed Colin Riley, who would be unable to attend the meeting on 30 July, and invited him to address the meeting as a local councillor.

Councillor Riley drew Members' attention to a note he had prepared, setting out his questions and those he felt the County Council needed to answer. In summary, he asked:

- Can the King John and Appleton schools accommodate these extra pupils? (Some Green Belt restrictions apply.)
- Will they be able to provide similar sporting facilities?
- Will they be able to provide the links to the special educational needs as provided by Glenwood?

Concerning Glenwood itself,

- If the closure goes ahead, this will delay the rebuild of Glenwood by 18 months; how will this affect the provision of Special Educational Needs?
- Is there a Plan B, for a rebuild on another site?
- If The Deanes is successful in becoming an academy/free school, is there a further plan?

One final point – the closure of The Deanes would limit parental choice, as it provides a genuine alternative option to the other schools in the area. Councillor Riley thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the meeting.

The Chairman welcomed representatives of sporting activities.

David Smith, Manager of the Sports Centre at The Deanes, drew Members' attention to the strong involvement in the community. There are 3,900 members on the club database. During term time, the facilities are subject to heavy use, having schools classes during the day and clubs in the evening and at weekends. In the school holidays, there is a comprehensive programme of events, and 100-150 children come through the doors daily. Over the course of the summer holidays some 2,200 children will be involved.

Mr Smith was looking forward to some further investment in The Deanes, to upgrade some facilities and possibly even expand the provision further. He noted that some of the largest clubs in Essex are based at The Deanes.

John Wilson of Rayleigh Archery Club acknowledged the long term support of The Deanes. From one junior member when they started at The Deanes, they now have 74, and over 500 children in junior schools receive coaching every week. Mr Wilson has a mandate from Archery GB to develop archery, including creating a GCSE syllabus. This is particularly of benefit to those children who dislike contact sport; and now over 700 students take this exam annually. There is also an engagement with and encouragement of archery for those with disabilities.

Lisa Burgoyne of Youth Sport Trust spoke. The Trust was set up as part of the creation of specialist sports colleges – of which The Deanes was one. She listed the School's involvement with the Trust:

- When the special funding ceased, The Deanes continued its involvement with the Trust, becoming a Gold Member.
- The Trust asked it to carry out a case study on leadership, with an accompanying film.
- The Deanes is the lead school for Essex, and leads a conference for young ambassadors for sport across the county. Mrs Atkinson is the "Head Teacher Ambassador" for Essex, and her influence is felt on a national level..
- It has continued its school sports partnership and embraces whatever programmes the Trust proposes. Recently 1500 youngsters were involved in a Bikeability event, including 40 disabled riders.
- There are schools on waiting lists for the Change for Life courses, which cover lifestyle as well as sports.

Ashlie Smith of Cartwheels Gymnastics Club pointed out that it would be hard to find another suitable location to meet if The Deanes were to close. The club uses large equipment and needs a lot of space, which the School can provide. There is a high demand for gymnastics at present, but this is the only competitive club this side of Southend. The club has 200 members, with a waiting list. The School not only makes a lot of time available to the club, but it discounts hire fees as well.

John Pitts, of Eastwood Netball Club, drew attention to the letter he had provided for Members, providing background on the club and reasons for the importance of The Deanes; but he asked the Committee to note one particular fact – that, because of its size, the club needs to use both the sports hall and the floodlit area for their training sessions, and the floodlit area for evening matches. He is unaware of any comparable facilities in the area, from Southend to Basildon to Chelmsford. He believes that if the facilities were to become unavailable, the club would have to close.

Eddie Moss of The Deanes Tennis Club, set out a few facts:

- 300 members (100 adult, 200 junior)
- Much coaching provision at all levels
- Very inclusive attitude – all standards play
- Open all year
- Very inexpensive - £30 pa for adults; £20 pa.

The Chairman pointed out that the Committee has noted the significance of the provision of sporting activities to the community. Members would have to evaluate the importance of this element.

c) The Deanes School as part of a wider Teaching Alliance

The Chairman welcomed David Franklin, Head Teacher, Chelmer Valley High School, and invited him to address the Committee.

Mr Franklin suggested that the key elements for him are collaboration and trust. He himself is often suspicious of those with ulterior motives, but he believes that the staff of The Deanes have no motive other than the good of the students. Schools do have to be competitive in attracting students, but he pointed out that Head teachers are vulnerable people, as many have lost their jobs in Essex recently. And they should be looked after, as they are also in a unique position, in being able to enhance the education of their students. So they can benefit from working together with other schools to gain support, encouragement and ideas.

With regard to the school reducing in size – one issue is where continuing professional development will come from. This is something the Alliance can provide. It has done joint Ofsted training and has done close mentoring relating to Assistant Head coaching. The links with those schools out of area can be beneficial, as they share different concerns. Mrs Atkinson is given strong support from other members of the Alliance.

Mrs Atkinson agreed, acknowledging that the County Council was nervous about having the school numbers reduced, but she invited Mr Franklin to demonstrate how the Alliance schools could provide many kinds of support.

Mr Carson acknowledged this support but suggested that the real problem was falling numbers.

The Chairman reminded Members that the evidence they had heard already suggested that there was not necessarily any correlation between academic success and size of school.

Mr Franklin agreed, adding that there is an ebb and flow of pupils in schools, which can see school numbers changing from year to year. The Alliance can help The Deanes through such a period. He added that in his view the School's situation had not been helped by the way in which it had been treated by County.

The Chairman thanked Mr Franklin for his contribution.

d) Parent Voice

The Chairman welcomed representatives of the parents of children at the School and invited comments. The full copy of the Response to the ECC Consultation by the Save The Deanes Group was tabled.

Cllr Butland reminded them that their best approach might be to talk about such issues as the reason for you choosing this school, what is special about the ethos of the school and what might be lost, were it to close. He had no desire to stop them addressing other matters, but these were issues that they, as parents, would seem best placed to explain.

Mrs Linda Allport-Hodge voiced the Save The Deanes Group's concern over two particular issues:

- The actual capacity of the King John and Appleton schools to take up The Deanes pupils (King John had at least planning permission for 6th Form accommodation, but Appleton had nothing.)
- The Deanes has an Ofsted "Good school with outstanding features – so it is not failing school. It also has excellent sports facilities, which are part of the school too. The other two schools simply do not have such facilities.

Mrs Allport-Hodge indicated the reasons for sending her son to The Deanes:

- Good education
- Good general ethos
- Rising standards – has shown a percentage improvement on a par with the best in the country
- Friendly atmosphere
- Small
- Good at engaging children – often using sport as a positive activity
- Inclusive.

In response to a question from the Chairman on defining "small", it was suggested that it wasn't exactly a question of numbers, but could be seen as having a small school ethos; so, each child's name was known to staff, and each child's own needs were considered. As one parent said, "It's not a GCSE treadmill".

Mr Russell Pagan pointed out that the children themselves have a very positive attitude toward the school. It may not be "shiny and new", unlike the King John, but it is seen as a part of the community, and removing it would be felt as a loss to the community. Furthermore, this community element feeds back to the school itself – the pupils themselves benefit from this state of affairs. The other schools are just that – but do not hold an equivalent position in the community.

Mrs Rebecca Howard pointed out that:

- Personal choice would be lessened if it was closed
- The School has a very positive attitude toward other schools, providing equipment, for example
- The School uses pre-term sports holiday clubs to encourage Year 7's to get to know each other before starting at the School
- The education is not just about exam results – although these are good; there is an education in community involvement
- Her daughter is happy there.

Mr Andy Johnson pointed out that The Deanes had not been their first choice of school for their eldest child, but now she is there, she is thriving, and now his other children do not want to go anywhere else.

Mrs Skinner pointed out that her son is an elite gymnast, who requires a lot of time away from school to support his sport. He has a designated mentor who understands his sport needs as well as his studies, and The Deanes has reallocated his timetable to enable him to keep up with his homework. The parents had looked into the approach of the other schools and they would not see giving any time off as warranted.

In response to the Chairman's question on why The Deanes does not seem to be very popular, it was suggested that the School had been very popular, but as soon as the newbuild was announced, its popularity dropped, as parents did not like the idea of their children attending a "building site". Also, the other schools were not very complimentary about The Deanes.

The Chairman asked for the parents' views on Glenwood, and The Deanes involvement with it. All were strongly for this and made several comments:

- The bringing together of the two schools onto one site would be revolutionary, providing a unique educational opportunity
- One had a son in a wheelchair – The Deanes had given him many opportunities to develop, linked to the Glenwood set up
- The attitude of the children themselves is very good – they find any poor attitude towards the disabled offensive.

Some opinions were expressed about the other schools and the prospect of The Deanes children transferring:

- At present, the facilities do not seem adequate to take more children
- It seems likely that The King John School – if they take them at all – intends to segregate the class of 30 who have transferred and they undoubtedly will be branded as "The Deanes pupils", which will not be healthy
- Both the King John and Appleton have entrance tests for those out of catchment. The Deanes has a real mix of abilities. It may not have the top students, but it still manages good results and manages to help pupils realise their potential

Comments were also made on the way the School had been treated by the County Council. Many parents feel that they have been let down by ECC, as the School has been told consistently to stay with the County Council – eg by reducing its numbers and not doing any development in preparation for the newbuild, and in not moving to Academy status. It had also been made clear that the expected admission figures would be 750 after the newbuild.

This has a huge impact on present parents, but also on future ones. There is an element of "constructive closure" about the way this has been done. Parents are uncertain about whether the School will be open, and so may not list it in their choices; so afterwards the County Council might look at the figures, see that they

are low and so be able to justify the closure – on the grounds that nobody wanted to go there.

Another element is the impact on the parents of those from Basildon and Southend – and on those schools themselves. There will be huge pressure put on the schools there. The Chairman confirmed that these were issues that the Committee intended to address; and Southend and Basildon had been invited to provide evidence.

The Committee noted the issues concerning the legalities of the making of this decision about the School, as set out in Appendix I to the Group's Report; but the Chairman pointed out that the Committee's brief was to gather evidence about the closure and to produce a report for the Cabinet Member. The Committee had no lawyer attached and so could not advise on such matters; he suggested the Group would need to seek its own legal advice on this.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Committee, noted the passion and commitment of both parents and school about this issue. In conclusion, he thanked everyone for their input and confirmed that the Committee would have completed its first round of evidence-gathering by the end of July. It will then assess the situation and take any further evidence, with a view to submitting the report to the Cabinet member before he makes his decision, in early September.

4. Date of next meeting

The Committee noted the date of the next meeting:
Monday 29 July 2013, at the offices of Castle Point Borough Council, where evidence will be received from local Members. At 10.00 am.

Before the meeting closed, Mrs Atkinson tabled plans for the newbuild for Members' information.

The meeting closed at 3.45 pm.

Minutes of the third Task and Finish Group Evidence Session

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE DEANES SCHOOL CONSULTATION TASK AND FINISH GROUP, A COMMITTEE OF THE PEOPLE AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, HELD AT THE OFFICES OF CASTLE POINT BOROUGH COUNCIL, BENFLEET, ON MONDAY 29 JULY 2013

County Councillors:

Committee members

* G Butland (Chairman)
* J Chandler
* T Higgins

* N Hume
* A Wood

Local Members

* A Bayley
D Blackwell
* R Howard

* J Huntman
J Reeves

Non-Elected Voting Member:

Mr R Carson

*present

The following officers were present in support throughout the meeting:

Robert Fox

Governance Officer

Matthew Waldie

Committee Officer

The meeting opened at 10.00 am.

1. Apologies

Mr R Carson.

Apologies were also received from Cllrs Dave Blackwell and Jill Reeves (who had made a written submission).

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of Wednesday 17 July were approved and signed by the Chairman.

4. Evidence from Local Members

The Chairman reminded all present that this was the third meeting of the Committee, aimed at taking evidence from local Members, including the local MP. He invited those local members present to address the Committee.

Councillor Jamie Huntman, Thundersley

Councillor Huntman began by reminding Members of the affiliation the school has with sport; in London over 100,000 children have taken up sport in the wake of the Olympics – so why is the County Council considering removing this school, with its strong links – especially tennis. Does the legacy end at the M25? It would not be correct to renege on the initial decision to rebuild the school and co-locate with Glenwood School.

The East of England draft plan states that 4,000 houses are needed in Castle Point in the next 20 years. At a rate of only one child in every third house this would mean that one whole school's worth of new houses are required in Castle Point. In response to a question, he stated that there is no great support in Castle Point for new housing but there is unquestionably a need for it. The school is an emotive subject and most people don't want green fields development, however, there are certain areas that are not areas of beauty and we need to look at facts and more housing is needed.

When asked why the school is comparatively unpopular and parents are not choosing the school as a preferred option, Councillor Huntman responded that a promise was made for a rebuild and that the school should 'hold its nerve'. We need schools that suit all abilities and interests and if the school was rebuilt people would be queuing up to go there. He also stated that the school has been 'in limbo' since the announcement that there would be a rebuild.

With regard to the integration of Glenwood School Councillor Huntman stated many parents have come to him to say they are keen that the school is integrated at The Deanes School.

In terms of community involvement Councillor Huntman said the school plays a significant role in the community, particularly with regard to its sports facilities and activities, and that he has never seen such public support for a school.

Councillor Alan Bayley, South Benfleet

Councillor Bayley began by requesting that the decision be put back a week, to the 9th September, so that some further evidence may be submitted. The Chairman responded that the Committee was not a decision-making body and had no say in this matter. He suggested that Councillor Bayley speak to Councillor Gooding.

Councillor Bayley stated that when the Glenwood School is moved its present site will be available for housing. However, he stated that local residents were concerned about social housing.

Councillor Bayley mentioned significant housing developments in Rayleigh and Wickford and that the children living in these homes will need a school in a few years' time. Therefore, it made no sense to close The Deanes School.

Councillor Ray Howard, Canvey Island West

Councillor Howard stated that he wished to be associated with the comments from colleagues within Castle Point in respect of the consultation to close The Deanes School. He did have concerns about the falling school roll and the potential budgetary deficit, and that it was right and proper these were brought to the attention of the Task and Finish Group. However, he had been taken aback when it was announced that the consultation process would be about to start.

Councillor Howard mentioned that Castle Point Borough Council has been criticised for not building enough houses and that it must find housing numbers in the borough.

Glenwood School has served the needs of those with disabilities for a considerable time and it is recognised the School needs to be rebuilt. Councillor Howard stated that CPBC Planning Department had expressed previous concerns about any expansion of the King John School site.

It was Councillor Howard's opinion that falling numbers at the school are a short-term blip and would rise rapidly in the next ten years. He stated he would hate it in ten years' time for the County Council to be forced to spend considerable money on building a new school after closing The Deanes School.

He referred to two further issues:

- Parental choice
- The knock-on effect on Southend schools.

Councillor Andrew Sheldon, St Marys Ward, Benfleet

Councillor Sheldon is a local Borough Councillor, who requested to speak, as he is unable to attend the meeting with Castle Point Councillors. He began by declaring an interest as a Governor of King John School. However, he has voluntarily suspended his governorship during the consultation period as he is receiving correspondence from residents.

Councillor Sheldon stated it is hard to reconcile how there was such a change of policy by Essex County Council almost overnight, unless there was a statistical revelation and a concern about falling rolls that was not addressed when the initial decision to rebuild the school was made. At no point were concerns raised with The Deanes by ECC and if there had they could have been asked to convene a special group of governors to look at the issue. He said the school was not asked for revised budget figures prior to the closure announcement.

He regarded the very use of the word "closure" dangerous in this context. It can have an impact so that it threatens to become a self-fulfilling prophecy – and it has done so, by creating concern with those who are intending to send their children to The Deanes. He is pleased that this Committee is undertaking this review, but concerned that no such exercise has been carried out before.

With regard to students at the school from outside the immediate area, Councillor Sheldon stated that you would be hard pressed to find a secondary school in Castle Point that does not have students from Southend-on-Sea and Basildon. What is the problem of parents sending their children to Castle Point from Southend and Basildon? It seems The Deanes is shouldering the blame for parents in Basildon not choosing to send their children to local schools, with ECC forcing aspirant parents in Basildon to send their children to their local schools. He stated he was not sure why this is raised so significantly in the consultation document, yet the sporting facilities are not highlighted within it.

Councillor Sheldon referred to a Freedom of Information request regarding the potential rebuild of the school with a net capacity of 750. He stated the response indicated that ECC would expect 750 to be reached if the rebuild were to occur.

Councillor Sheldon also stated that too much emphasis in the consultation is being placed on Castle Point housing numbers and that account should also be taken of developments in Basildon and Southend-on-Sea.

His final concern is with the 3 apparent options set out in the document:

- i. Close The Deanes and expand the others
- ii. Keep The Deanes open
- iii. Keep The Deanes open and expand others

This third option is not feasible, because of the restraints on capital expenditure. In his view, it may be seen as a “splitter”, dividing the positive responses to the consultation. Also, why is the option of a smaller school not included?

Councillor Sheldon also suggested that the housing situation at Southend and Basildon should be considered. To which the Chairman confirmed that the Committee would be doing so.

Rebecca Harris MP

Mrs Harris stated that The Deanes School had been promised monies for rebuild and had been asked not to apply for Academy status. Therefore, the school has not redecorated as it did not wish to waste taxpayers' money. Tenders were issued in March 2013 for the rebuild, only a few weeks before the decision to close the school. Mrs Harris questioned what had happened in the ECC Education Department to have such a dramatic shift of policy.

There is a national blip in secondary school places. This is temporary and should be recognised. The decision to close The Deanes School would be a short-term decision based on short-term factors thus leaving the county vulnerable in future years.

Mrs Harris stated as the school has always served out of borough students she could not understand why such a play is made of this in the consultation documentation, which is, in her opinion, absurd, unbalanced and biased with regard to out of borough students. There is a clear assumption in the consultation document that the two other schools in Benfleet will remain more popular than

The Deanes and that other currently unpopular schools will become popular. This is a poor assumption. Things change quickly and we need the flexibility to cope.

There is statutory guidance on the closure of a maintained school, and the standard of education is something ECC must consider. Out of 73 schools in Essex The Deanes is ranked 44th highest on five A*-C GCSEs, and 28th on value-added. This is an extraordinary and unprecedented case of a County Council closing a good school. It is a perverse decision on a range of factors including taking something out of the system that is unique in terms of its outreach to the 48 primary schools in the area. The knowledge and relationships that have been built-up will be a loss to the wider community. Mrs Harris stated we should not be talking about the current economic climate but the education of children. It will be catastrophic and I urge the County Council to approach central government for capital funding.

In response to the Chairman's question on the different kind of education available at The Deanes, Mrs Harris stated that Castle Point is lucky to have such good schools in the borough, but the difference at The Deanes is clear. She said small schools offer something different and unique. There is a desire for that and many children and parents feel more comfortable in the smaller environment. The argument that smaller schools cannot deliver is a spurious one. The implication in the consultation document is that you would not want more than two outstanding schools in Benfleet. But meaningful choices for parents should be encouraged and there is vast potential for the co-location of The Deanes and Glenwood Schools. The two schools have tired buildings compared to the other schools in the area.

Following a question relating to whether a third school is needed in Benfleet if the other two schools can cope with the additional numbers Mrs Harris contended that while she would not want the County Council to waste public funds it is quite wrong that capital spend be saved. The issue is not whether the other schools can cope, but whether The Deanes is viable. She requested the Task and Finish Group look again at the projected numbers and they would show that it is quite likely a new school would be needed in five years' time if The Deanes School were to be closed. She also stated that it is not acceptable to squeeze children into other schools they did not want to go to.

In response to the Chairman's asking if she thought the school would be sufficiently popular, Mrs Harris stated her belief that The Deanes would make the most of its unique selling points and establish itself as a niche school.

The Chairman thanked all for their contributions.

4. Date of next meeting

The Committee noted the date of the next meeting:
Tuesday 30 July 2013, at the offices of Castle Point Borough Council, where evidence will be received from Castle Point Borough Council. At 10.00 am.

The meeting closed at 11.49 am.

Minutes of the fourth Task and Finish Group Evidence Session

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE DEANES SCHOOL CONSULTATION TASK AND FINISH GROUP, A COMMITTEE OF THE PEOPLE AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, HELD AT THE OFFICES OF CASTLE POINT BOROUGH COUNCIL, BENFLEET, ON TUESDAY 30 JULY 2013

County Councillors:

* G Butland (Chairman)	* N Hume
* J Chandler	* A Wood
* T Higgins	

Non-Elected Voting Member:

* Mr R Carson

*present

The following Castle Point Borough Councillors were in attendance:

P Challis (Chairman)	W Dick
C Brunt	S Hart
P Burch	N Ladzrie

The following officers were present in support throughout the meeting:

Robert Fox	Governance Officer
Matthew Waldie	Committee Officer

The meeting opened at 10.00 am.

1. Apologies

The meeting noted that Castle Point Borough Councillors Godfrey Isaacs and Colin Riley were unable to attend the meeting.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Evidence from Castle Point Borough Council

The Chairman reminded all present that this was the fourth meeting of the Committee, aimed at taking evidence from the local Borough Council. He invited those Castle Point Borough Councillors present to address the Committee.

Councillor Challis OBE, Leader of Castle Point Borough Council, began by pointing out that the contribution of The Deanes School to education in the area does just not rest with secondary education but also to the contribution the school makes to primary schools in the area, particularly in the sporting sphere.

Primary schools in the area will be left in difficulty if The Deanes were to close. Councillor Peter Burch stated the school also supports primary school children in subjects other than sport – this is something, in his opinion, that King John and Appleton do not necessarily do. The school also hosts sport and leisure facilities, and being an Olympic Borough, this is something the Borough Council would wish to support. Councillor Norman Ladzrie mentioned the close links The Deanes School has with Hadleigh Junior School in particular, including providing the junior school with accommodation when it had subsidence issues.

Councillor Cliff Brunt referred to the housing numbers provided by ECC. He contended that the number of houses to be built in Castle Point is more than that provided by the County Council. Councillor Brunt also questioned whether Appleton and King John schools would be able to take the additional numbers from any closure of The Deanes School in future years.

Councillor Bill Dick referred to a recent planning application from King John School which was successful despite CPBC Planning Officers' refusal notice. Steve Rogers, Head of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods, Castle Point BC, stated that King John is situated within green belt and is quite extensively developed and any applications are tested against national and local green belt guidelines. Further work needs to be done at King John with regard to car parking following the planning approval by the Committee. The school is at the limit in terms of on-site playing field provision. Appleton School is not within green belt, but further building at Appleton School brings difficulties in terms of playing field provision. Appleton School is served by a residential street so difficulties would be expected at opening and closing times in terms of additional traffic. On questioning it was confirmed any additional students would have to be accommodated within existing buildings.

With regard to housing developments Cllr Dick mentioned developments in the Basildon Borough and Rochford District Council areas close to the A127. Additionally, there is a pre-application for 450 new homes very close to The Deanes School on the relief road from Stadium Way to Daws Heath Road. There is also a planning appeal for 130 homes close by. The Planning Inspectorate says that Castle Point Borough Council is 1,000 houses behind need and is required to build at least 200 new homes a year. Following questioning on the number of houses CPBC will build in the next two years Councillor Dick responded that in addition to those previously mentioned there would be 170 new homes on Felsted Road, plus 160 on Kiln Road and around 50-60 at other locations in the borough. Councillor Ladzrie stated the school owns land in Scrub Lane which will be sold off to Essex County Council and 150 new homes will be located there.

Councillor Challis stated the Thames Gateway and Lakeside Basin developments will have a huge impact on the area in the next five to ten years. As these plans come out in the public arena there will likely be huge pressures on the borough. Councillor Burch mentioned the consultation on the third Thames crossing, with one of the preferred options being close to the borough. If this were to happen a significant number of people will be displaced and some of these will come to the borough and introduce additional pressures.

Steve Rogers stated Castle Point Borough Council has nine strategic sites and will provide 1,200 dwellings and this is the five year plan. The Planning Inspectorate did not believe the council has a five year land supply. There is a risk that developers will come forward and argue any developments be brought forward on that basis. The Council is looking at any adjustments in green belt policy, and is looking at all parts of the green belt and this might include the area around the King John School.

When questioned how many of the new dwellings are single occupancy and flats, as contended by Essex County Council, Mr Rogers replied that development viability work has shown that flats are not viable in the CPBC area; therefore, 90% of all the plans going forward at the moment are for family houses. As a supplementary question Mr Rogers was asked about the contention from ECC that the new dwellings will, in the main, be one and two bedroom dwellings. He reiterated that developers say smaller units are simply not viable in Castle Point. He would provide the Task and Finish Group with a Council resolution from September 2012 which outlines the nine strategic sites in the borough, and the Strategic Land Availability Assessment which shows that new units will, by-and-large, be family units. Councillor Challis, as Leader of CPBC, would also confirm this in writing to the Task and Finish Group. *[These documents were subsequently provided to the Task and Finish Group.]*

Councillor Simon Hart pointed out that if a three-mile circle were drawn around the location of The Deanes School it would take in housing developments from other Districts/Boroughs.

Councillor Challis raised a concern around the admissions criteria of both Appleton and King John schools in respect that the lead admission criterion is children with siblings at the school. As both schools take children from outside the borough this would impact upon local youngsters who will see children from outside the borough get priority over them.

Councillor Hart reiterated that The Deanes School takes many students from other adjacent boroughs, and that 18 months ago the school was at capacity. He stated that when Dr Tim Coulson was questioned, at one of the public consultation meetings, about the forecast numbers for a rebuilt Deanes he confirmed that the County Council would work on the basis that numbers would be at the capacity of 750.

In response to questions about parental preference, which indicates that local parents are choosing not to send their children to The Deanes School, and the philosophy and ethos of the school, Councillor Challis stated there are children who are not happy in a larger school environment and The Deanes has a community feel to it. Councillor Brunt said the school is outward looking undertaking significant outreach activity. Nothing has been done to the building and the school has been hanging on due to promises of monies. Some parents will have seen the building and decided not to send children there on that basis. He also said that it was not clear how the £2million for the two other schools to accommodate The Deanes School students was to be used.

When questioned about the benefits of the integration of the special needs school Councillor Dick responded that Glenwood School has children with challenging needs. The Deanes have associated themselves with this school and wish to work with them. If Glenwood School was moved in isolation it would be no better than it currently is. The whole ethos of the integration was to provide pupils with disadvantage a chance. The Deanes School have always been outward looking and have, in the past, struggled for numbers. The promise of the rebuild and co-location with Glenwood School would have created an inclusive community. For the good of Castle Point the school should be retained. Councillor Burch said he was concerned that support and encouragement for disadvantaged youngsters would disappear if The Deanes were to close.

Castle Point Borough Council could not provide any guarantees to maintain or relocate the sports facilities at The Deanes School given budgetary constraints on Local Authorities. The existing two sports facilities are heavily subsidised already – it is likely that the loss of The Deanes would not only mean the facilities were lost to the borough, but also the considerable expertise of the teaching staff who were involved in coaching and developing sport in the area.

In conclusion Councillor Dick stated it is wrong to go out to consultation to close The Deanes School rather than consulting on its future. People and parents think it is a *fait accompli*. The view of the public in Castle Point is not to close the school but to see how to make it work.

The Chairman concluded the meeting by thanking the Borough Councillors for their contribution to this process, and for the use of their facilities. It now remained for the Task & Finish Group to consider the evidence they have heard, determine whether they need a further meeting and to decide on how to proceed.

The meeting closed at 11.49 am.

Minutes of the fifth Task and Finish Group Evidence Session

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE DEANES SCHOOL CONSULTATION TASK AND FINISH GROUP, A COMMITTEE OF THE PEOPLE AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD, ON TUESDAY 6 AUGUST 2013

County Councillors:

* G Butland (Chairman)	* N Hume
* J Chandler	* A Wood
T Higgins	

Non-Elected Voting Member:

Mr R Carson

*present

The following officers were present in support throughout the meeting:

Christine Sharland	Scrutiny Officer
Matthew Waldie	Committee Officer

The meeting opened at 10.00 am.

1. Apologies

Cllr T Higgins
Mr R Carson.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Additional Evidence from Cllr Gooding, Dave Hill and Tim Coulson

The Chairman welcomed Cllr Gooding, Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning, Mr Dave Hill, Executive Director for Schools, Children and Families and Dr Coulson, Director for Education and Learning, to the meeting. He reminded Members that, following the initial meeting, the Committee had sought further information in certain areas. One of these was corporate knowledge, providing an account of events as they took place, when the original decision was taken. He invited Mr Hill to address this issue.

Mr Hill pointed out that when he arrived at the County Council in November 2010, the BSF programme had just been withdrawn. He took a view of capital use across the board; and one conclusion he reached was that special schools had been neglected and should be supported. He shared this view with Terry Reynolds, the Director of Education and Learning at the time. At the same time,

Cllr Castle, the Cabinet Member for Education, made it clear that The Deanes was his first priority. Mr Hill noted that the original capital figure of £26 million had not included Glenwood but was simply a replacement for the BSF Plan for The Deanes. However, as it was considered a marginal decision at the time, discussion ensued, resulting in the idea of bringing the two schools together. The figure also reduced to £22 million.

Mr Hill noted that the responsibility for mainstream and special schools was at times divided between different portfolios during the previous administration, so involving Cllrs Castle and Candy at different times.

Mr Hill believes strongly that there is no correlation between rebuild and good education outcomes and he made this clear to Cllr Castle at the time. (In response to this point, the Chairman questioned whether linking newbuild to education outcomes in this way is relevant in this case, given that The Deanes is not a poor standard school.)

Mr Hill suggested that what has happened in the intervening period is that the numbers have not been maintained and so the school is not now viable, moving forward.

Regarding documentation, the capital programme would have come to the Corporate Leadership Team, but it would not have been presented in great detail. Mr Hill had urged the Cabinet Member to be cautious, and he heard similar concerns voiced by Mr Reynolds. If there was to be a rebuild, it should be ensured that

- It would do what it was supposed to do
- It would seem a reasonable decision to other schools that had had their own BSF funding withdrawn.

In response to a question from the Chairman about whether Cllr Castle thought he should walk away from this decision, given the potential for a perceived conflict of interest, Mr Hill stated no, but he, as SCF Director had made it clear to the Cabinet Member that he should be careful in general. Such conversations did take place.

The Chairman noted that Cllr Candy did demonstrate the commitment for the rebuild with Glenwood by signing off £400k to purchase the property at the school entrance.

Mr Hill agreed that it may have been a close call, but it had not been a perverse decision. However he added that Cllr Castle would have received the same advice as Cllr Gooding, had he remained Cabinet Member in May of this year.

Cllr Hume expressed surprise that, following the capital reductions of 2010, this project had not been subject to more discussion, being one of the larger surviving projects.

When asked about the reliability of the numbers, Mr Hill explained the process. On his arrival, he had asked for a major review to be carried out across the

county, using a national formula and expert assistance to review the findings. This review, conducted in late 2011/early 2012, suggested there would be pockets of large growth (eg Colchester) but predicted no demographic growth for this area or Rochford. In Harlow, for example, there is a surplus of school places, but these will fill up in the next few years. Even if building started on new housing in the area immediately, it would take many years for the resulting new children to reach secondary school age. The Deanes simply cannot be allowed to struggle for a ten year period, waiting for numbers to rise. This is the same policy that the ECC has adopted throughout the County.

In response Cllr Hume pointed out that families moving into new houses bring children of all ages with them, not just infants. He also suggested that the development of Shell Haven will bring a large influx of people wishing to live in this area, in preference to certain other areas. Mr Hill replied that the evidence they had seen implies that the impact will be spread right across the area (rather than be mainly felt in Castle Point).

Mr Hill responded to a few questions from Members:

- The Deanes has not been considered in isolation – mobility in respect of the unitaries and other areas has been factored into the figures
- There seems to have been a sudden push for a different decision; but this is not so – the capital programme is reviewed annually and decisions made on the back of this. The change in administration provides an extra timing element here, with the addition of the pre-election period, during which time few changes are implemented
- Regarding the potential “chicken and egg” dilemma of prospective parents, who may be put off the school by its state of poor repair, because it has been promised capital expenditure, but also the prospect of a newbuild may also put them off – this may be so, but the prospect of a better school emerging is what parents have to take into consideration. No doubt it will put some off, but that is inevitable
- Although there is a difference in approach shown by The Deanes in comparison to the two other local schools, he did not accept the argument that this is an issue of choice for parents. In an ideal world, the ECC would provide the full range of schools in every area, but that is not possible. Closing The Deanes leaves two very good schools in the area; it certainly means less choice for parents, but not a lack of choice
- This is a harder choice to make, as The Deanes is not a bad school; but this does not make the decision wrong.

The Chairman thanked Mr Hill for his input and Mr Hill left the meeting.

The Chairman reminded Members that certain questions had arisen from their initial scrutiny, which they had referred back to the Cabinet Member and Dr Coulson. Some of these had been answered already, but some remained.

The first concerned the £2 million funding for Appleton and King John schools. Cllr Gooding explained the proposals. The money was for capital expenditure, to allow the development of facilities. Each school would need to present a plan; the money would be held by the ECC and would pay off bills as they occurred.

Sign off will be required from both schools to confirm they are able to do this. The Appleton School will use their existing footprint. The King John will be making alterations to existing buildings; the suggestion that Deanes children will be segregated in a youth centre is inaccurate – the building will be adapted appropriately and children mixed accordingly. The commitment is crucial, but the fine detail is not expected at this stage.

Dr Coulson pointed out that the issue of the sixth form in each school has been fortuitous, as it will provide spare capacity to accommodate the extra pupils from The Deanes, over the next few years. Officers from Property Services have been in touch with both schools and are happy with the situation.

Cllr Gooding confirmed he was confident that these schools would take the extra children. Each school has conducted its own consultation and nothing has come back indicating a significantly adverse reaction. The only negative comments have centred on the potential lowering of academic standards. But the Governors and Head Teachers are in support of the plan.

Cllr Wood pointed out that it appears that a new school will be required in the area in due course. Cllr Gooding agreed that it may turn out to be the case, but questioned whether a school like this could be retained in the meantime. If numbers were to drop, say to 300, it would be hard to see how it could employ the necessary teaching staff.

Cllr Hume believed that the school could thrive if it is marketed properly and given some support. Cllr Gooding acknowledged the School's cogent argument, but doubted that they would be able to achieve the significant jump in market share to take their numbers to 600.

The Chairman noted that the exercise has concentrated the mind of the school, which has produced revised figures. He added that the area under review is wider than just Castle Point, and the issues concern more than just the secondary schools.

A further question arising from the first meeting was whether the Council had a view of the integration of special schools with mainstream schools. Cllr Gooding believed there was no ECC policy or view. It may need to be looked at, but his own belief was that it should develop on a local basis. In this case, barriers had been broken down, but the way it has developed has been the result of convenience. The redevelopment of Glenwood is evidently required, but it should be considered as a separate issue.

The Chairman queried whether the purchase of the property at the entrance to The Deanes indicated the existence of some policy. Dr Coulson replied that a rebuild for Glenwood had been sought since 1998 but it had proved difficult to find space. Using potential space at The Deanes presented a pragmatic solution. In the wake of this, a vision arose. For The Deanes, there was no other option. For Glenwood, the priority is getting the rebuild. In response to the Chairman's question whether Glenwood would prefer co-location or being on their own, Dr Coulson suggested they might find that hard to answer.

The Chairman asked whether the County Council was satisfied with the housing situation. Cllr Gooding acknowledged the apparent disparity between the different sets of figures. He quoted from the new Local Plan Proposed Policies document (dated May 2103), which Castle Point had shared on a confidential basis with the County Council (and so is not referred to in the documentation). Inter alium, this alludes to the need for more smaller dwellings to be built, to provide housing for entering the property ladder. This emphasis, which was reflected in the County Council's original document, seemed to contradict the view expressed by Borough Councillors at the 30 July meeting, which put the emphasis on the need for 3-bedroom family homes.

Dr Coulson made several points:

- Castle Point had confirmed that the details were right at the time of the review
- Joanna Killian has written to the Chief Executive of Castle Point BC, seeking clarification of the figures, as these are important for the proposals
- Two issues arise from the figures:
 - What are the actual numbers?
 - Some sense of the phasing of this development over the next 5/10 years is needed, to indicate when and how changes will occur
- The school itself agrees that 600 is the crucial number – the problem seems to be that parents have indicated that they do not want their children to go there. The school is also no longer seen as a school of escape, as the negative side of the schools in the surrounding area is changing. There is capacity in the Basildon schools, although they are not particularly popular. We need to see if the demographics will change sufficiently to ensure that the school will fill up in the medium, rather than the long term.

The Chairman accepted that the housing figures were based on the information given. He noted that Castle Point are now under significant pressure from the Inspector and Secretary of State to do something about the lack of housing development. But there would not be clarity on this before the deadline for the decision (2 September).

A second point is the position of the Appleton and King John schools – will they definitely take the children from Deanes? Again, confirmation of this seems unlikely before 2 September.

In response, Cllr Gooding felt confident about the schools' position. Regarding the housing, he had serious concerns that there will be a significant gap in the numbers of children in the short to medium term, which would adversely affect the level of education, whatever the housing figures turn out to be.

Cllr Hume asked Cllr Gooding for a response to Southend's letter, where their Executive Councillor, Children and Learning, had expressed the Borough's opposition to the closure.

Cllr Gooding noted:

- At a meeting with parents from Southend whose children attend The Deanes, the response of these parents was to ask what Southend is doing, as they were unable to get local places in the Borough
- The approach is different in the Borough, where there are grammar schools. There is a trade-off, as ECC children attend their grammar schools, and children from the Borough attend ECC schools. All three of these Castle Point schools have children from Southend
- He acknowledged that closing The Deanes would affect the movement of children around the area – the wider area is relevant, but it is not as simple as it may sound at first.

In response to a question from the Chairman whether any newbuild had led to a reduction in numbers, Dr Coulson confirmed that Basildon Academy, which had cost £50 million, had proved very unpopular. On Canvey, the closure of one school had led to two successful schools. And Belfairs (in Southend) had been unpopular, but is now over-subscribed and results in children attending The Deanes. However, it was unlikely that a popularity factor might be built into any remodelling – it would be too hard to measure.

The Chairman pointed out that these other schools had been failing, whereas The Deanes was not. However, Dr Coulson pointed out that there is a very strong secondary school base in the area and The Deanes is being squeezed, as the weakest of the three.

In response to the Chairman's question on the issue of giving choice to parents, Dr Coulson agreed that in an ideal situation, they would want to keep it. However, the Council is saying that the school will dip, and when it does it will cease as a worthy choice.

Dr Coulson responded to the Chairman on the process:

- Should one of the two schools produce an Ofsted Report at a lower level than that of The Deanes, the County Council would still be able to use it to provide places for The Deanes pupils
- The Cabinet Member would have to take a decision, based on two particular reports: 1, from County Council officers, which comprises a synthesis of the consultation, a working through of the argument and a recommendation; and 2, the report of the Task & Finish Group.

Cllr Wood reminded Members that, for all the importance of the 600 minimum number, the children are what matter here.

In response, Dr Coulson agreed, pointing out that in his view the County Council would be letting these children down if they were to leave the situation as it was. In the past, decisions have been delayed until a later stage. This had made the situation very obvious and the final decision easier to make; but it had also created a very bad spiral of decline. On this occasion, the intention is to deal with the situation before the spiral kicks in. This is for the children's benefit above all.

As a final statement, the Cabinet Member confirmed that the he believed the school's case to be robust about the roll figure of 600, the only issue being whether this figure was achievable.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their input. He confirmed that the Committee would produce its report for the Cabinet Member by the end of the month.

The meeting closed at 2.23 pm.

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